April, 1986

Dear sisters and supporters,

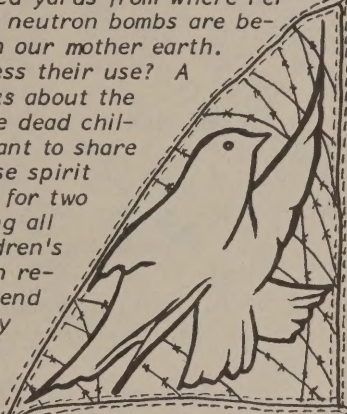
Many wimyn, new and old, have been continuing to create and experience the Seneca peace camp. We are like a patchwork quilt whose pieces are the stories, songs, actions, experiences, and contributions of so many. A single letter cannot portray the color and beauty of this quilt, but we want to share a few of the stories from the last several months.

Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice

5440 Route 96, Romulus, NY 14541, (607) 869-5825

A small group of wimmin gather to share personal poetry, Journal entries, essays, stories. We start out shyly, "Oh, this is stupid, and besides, it rhymes." As we gather courage, though, the writing expresses our most intimate joys and pains. One womon reads a prayer of rage after rape. Another responds with painful poetry about her own rape experience. Around the circle so many have similar stories. One womon cries, "Why is it normal that every womon has a rape story?" And we weep together the tears kept hidden as we hold her and each other.

We are sitting in a circle in front of the main gate of the Depot maintaining an overnight vigil for the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Each womon reads a statement made by a survivor of the bombings telling of the horror they witnessed. Our sense of loss and helplessness is intense. We are sitting a few hundred yards from where Pershing II and neutron bombs are being stored in our mother earth. Will we witness their use? A womon speaks about the spirits of the dead children. We want to share joy with these spirit children, so for two hours we sing all the fun children's songs we can remember and end with a lullaby of peace and joy. We are here for the children.



July sixth, 300-400 wimyn walk the four miles to the Q-zone gate for a midnight vigil and action. Some wimyn weave a web of bright colored yarn over our heads from the fence to trees and poles behind us. A drunk man from a small group of counter demonstrators keeps trying to tear down the web and wimyn keep holding it up with our fingers and retying it. The police might say we were vandalizing with our web; they have been watching the back and forth for a while. Then they intervene to stop the man from destroying it. Somehow they decided to defend this symbol of life, for whatever it meant to us, rather than this man's drunken rage. When the contrast appears so clearly, it opens the door for this surprise of heart over legality.

I am standing naked in the open field called Amazon Acres, starting my shower. I can hear the sound of rapid gun fire, mortar rounds, and explosions on the base. An army helicopter approaches. I continue my shower as the helicopter hovers over me. I feel very naked, cold, and terrified. I hear myself screaming, "I'm not a revolutionist, what am I doing here? I'm just a mother and a grandmother." I resist the urge to run for cover and slowly rinse the soap from my body, wrap a towel around my hair, look up at the men and give the womyn's empowerment sign. The helicopter moves on and I in my nakedness walk slowly back to my tent. I listen to my soul telling me that my reason for being here is that I am a mother and a grandmother.

She is 11 and visits her sister at the peace camp. It's fun to play in the fields and sing songs around the fire. But she hears about the plane loading missile parts. She sees the bruises of the wimmin who have gone over the fence to protest the shipment and were very roughly treated by the guards who caught them. She writes a letter to the president. Then it hits her. How can she play and be happy and be a kid again? How can she stop thinking of nuclear war? She hopes her parents will tell her none of it is real, even if they are lying. The wimmin hold her, let her know it's okay to not feel it all the time, and she will play again. And we are doing our best to keep it from happening. What can we say to our children?

Average Dyke Band, September '85
We're passing through each other's lives, sharing laughter sharing pain
A tribe of womyn loving womyn growing stronger as we change
Merry meet and merry part and may we merry meet again
...That's the life here, womyn come and then they go
leaves me waiting on a letter, listening for the telephone
love them fully while they're here and when they've gone let them go
rumor has it that the womyn always make their way back home...

To extend the metaphor, the pieces of the quilt often seem to accumulate faster than they can be sewn together and quilted. The fall of '85 has been much like a quilting bee. In several regional meetings we focused on the important issue of consensus process, and how we reach cooperative decisions through conflicts of perspective. It has been exhausting at times, and also encouraging as we have reaffirmed with new participants and in new situations our commitment to feminist nonviolence and consensus process as essential toward a transformation of society that will bring about the end of nuclear arms.

Data released in June '85 (Nuclear Battlefields: Global Links in the Arms Race, Richard Fieldhouse & William Arkin, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C.) confirm that the Seneca Army Depot is the largest U.S. Army nuclear weapons storage depot in the world. About nine Pershing II missiles are shipped to Europe every seven weeks. The peace camp remains a continual challenge to such weapons. In this society oriented toward immediate results, it is often difficult to assert the truly revolutionary importance of how we do what we do. At the Encampment we challenge social structures which foster domination as we experiment with models for social structures in which everyone can thrive. Sometimes it seems miraculous that we are still here. We know it is possible through enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work. Seneca continues to be what all of us bring to it.

As spring draws near we need more wimyn who are able to give several weeks or months to the ongoing tasks and responsibilities on the land. There is work to be done for the renewal of our camping permit, summer structures to set up, organization and communication between Seneca "the camp" and Seneca "the web of wimyn across the world," record keeping, etc., etc.! Off the land, we always need individuals and groups to do ongoing fundraising, presentations, communication (excellent slideshows and videotapes are available). As we look to the summer of '86, we see our ongoing peace presence as a primary focus. We need wimyn to come and camp for peace! The actions, outreach, education, networking, empowerment are created by all of us, by what we bring and share. We are planning a major action for Saturday, July 5th. We're excited about the Women Take Liberty action in NY City on Sunday, August 3rd and are planning a week of focus July 25th through August 1st just before that action. (See attached flyers.) We'd like to publish another JANE DOE and need your stories, skills, and funds.

Right now we really need your financial support. There are fewer wimyn here during the winter, but most expenses do not decrease. We need money for land payments, utilities, wood, repairs, telephone, mailings, supplies, food.... We need money to prepare for the summer. What you are able to give us will enable the unique work that goes on here to continue.

In peace and struggle,

Seneca Encampment Wimyn

P.S. The response to this mailing is going to be the primary source of our operating money until we open for camping!

Clip and return to Seneca Encampment, 5440 Route 96, Romulus, NY 14541 (607)869-5825

I am making a donation of $_____

I want to continue sending $_____per month.

(For tax deductable donations $50 and over, make checks out to "Holding Our Own")

I plan to come to the camp during spring or summer of 1986

_____
dates

I plan to do outreach/fundraising for the camp in my local community ☐ yes ☐ send info

Please add the following names to the mailing list:

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____Zipcode_____

Phone_____

☐ Check here if you do not want your name given to other organizations.

☐ Please delete my name from the mailing list.